

Environmental Assessment

Environmental Assessment (EA) Number: OR-056-02-014

Title: Equine Management, Inc. Use of Trails Across Public Lands in the Cline Buttes Area

Permit Number: 056-8-0013H

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office: Prineville

Resource Area: Deschutes

I. Purpose and Need

Equine Management, Inc. (EMI) has applied for a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to conduct guided horseback tours on public lands in the Cline Buttes area to facilitate access to adjacent private lands where there are long, looping trails.

The applicant holds an existing BLM-issued SUP for guided horseback services associated with the Eagle Crest Resort allowing 3000 use days per annum, with group sizes limited to 7 people per trip, 6 guests and 1 guide. Equine Management Inc. has conducted commercial, guided horse rides on BLM managed lands since 1998. This commercial activity is permitted under a Special Recreation Permit issued by the Prineville District BLM. Equine Management Inc. provides the horses and guide service, while Eagle Crest Resort provides the physical infrastructure (corrals, etc.).

At the end of Equine Management's 2000 use season, Eagle Crest Resorts chose to relocate the base of operations for trail rides from the existing location east of the Cline Falls Highway in Phase I of the resort. The new location selected by Eagle Crest Resorts is at the northwest corner of Phase III. The new location was chosen for a variety of reasons, among them:

- The new location will avoid having riders cross Cline Falls Highway, increasing public safety
- The availability of shorter rides from the existing staging area at Phase I has been limited due to resource concerns regarding rides on Eagle Crest property adjacent to the Deschutes River
- Rides leaving from the current staging area have to cross through other developed areas or areas under construction in Phase II and Phase III of Eagle Crest Resort.

The applicant has proposed four trail alternatives for conducting guided horseback rides across public lands. Three alternative routes were studied in support of this Environmental Assessment. After field examination, trails "B", "C" and "D" were removed from further consideration due to the steepness of grade, trail braiding and/or because construction of new trail segments would be required.

PROPOSAL OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are to: 1) allow valid recreational use of public lands in appropriate areas; 2) concentrate recreational use to a defined and durable trail route.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

Only the No-Action and the proposed actions will be considered in this Environmental Assessment (EA). The proposed action would be in conformance with the Brothers LaPine Resource Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (Record of Decision - July, 1989), available for review at Prineville District BLM, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, Oregon.

No-Action

A No-Action alternative would deny the Equine Management, Inc. application for a SRP. This alternative would result in no change in existing public use of the area and no changes would occur to the existing utility access roads and user-created network of trails on the subject public lands. Although, with the impending development of Eagle Crest Phase III, there will likely be an increase in public land visitors in this area.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would be to issue the applicant a SRP allowing use of Trail “A”, which is confined along an existing trail segment that traverses the northern portion of the subject property for a distance of approximately 1,560 feet (see attached maps). Trail “A” currently experiences use by horseback riders, ATVs, and motorcycles and would be close to a planned stabling operation within the proposed Eagle Crest phase III subdivision.

III. Description of the Affected Environment

General Location

The proposed project area is located on the northwest slope of Cline Buttes and approximately one mile south of Highway 126. The legal description of the project site is Township 15 South, Range 12 East, the east one quarter of section 17. The project site is approximately 160 acres in size and is peninsular in shape: the adjacent parcels to the east and west are under private and State of Oregon ownership and to the north are publicly owned lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Prineville Field Office.

The general area gently slopes to the northwest from Cline Buttes and includes two intermittent drainages.

Soils

Two soil types are represented within this area, Deschutes-Stukel and Redcliff-Licksillet complexes. The west end consists of Deschutes-Stukel complex where the landform is described as lava plains with soils 0 – 17 inches. Redcliff-Licksillet soils are toe slopes with an average soil depth of 0 – 10 inches. The mean precipitation for both soil types is 8 – 12 inches.

Vegetation

The overstory vegetation is western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*), with the understory consisting of big sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) and needlegrass (*Stipa* spp.). Peck's milkvetch (*Astragalus peckii*) habitat is known to be to the south and west of the project area.

Wildlife

No threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to occur within the project area. Water is sparse in the project area. Due to the proximity of the project area to Highway 126 and the City of Redmond, poaching is a concern. Old juniper trees within the area of Trail "A" have excellent potential for cavity nesting species, and bat roosting. Habitat for ground and shrub nesting birds is also fairly abundant. The project area has the potential of be used by foraging hawks, owls, and bats. No known raptor nests exist in the project area. (See attached waiver).

Recreation

The area is used for a variety of recreational activities including hiking, mountain biking, motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle use, and horseback riding. Recreational use is a mixture of local area residents, residents of Bend/Redmond and central Oregon visitors from other parts of the state. Recreational activities occur year round. Other public lands in the general area have been used for illegal dumping and target shooting for many years.

A network of user-created trails and roads exists in the area. The area is designated as Limited in the Brothers/LaPine Resource Management Plan, which states that off road vehicle use in Cline Buttes be limited to existing, or designated roads and trails, or season of use. The project area is not under any temporary closures to motorized vehicles or shooting, however the Cline Buttes area is.

IV. Impacts

The following impacts are described considering the implementation of mitigating measures and monitoring as prescribed in the Brothers/La Pine RMP, as well as those identified specifically for this project.

Soil and Vegetation

No-Action

No adverse impacts to vegetation and soils would be expected as this trail system is already in place. Regeneration of trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs could be hindered in locations that are exposed to heavy use by current recreational visitors.

Proposed Action

No adverse impacts to soil or ground vegetation are expected by permitting EMI's SRP request. It is possible however, that some western juniper might be pruned to allow safe passage of horses and their riders. (See attached waiver).

Cultural Resources

No-Action

No further impacts would be expected if the Special Recreation Permit were not granted.

Proposed Action

It is not probable that any impacts would be made to any cultural resources as a result of the proposed action however if, any human remains, cultural and/or paleontological resources (historic or prehistoric or vertebrate fossil site or object) discovered as a result of project implementation shall immediately be reported by telephone to the authorized officer. All project activities in the immediate area of such discovery shall be suspended until the authorized officer issues written notification. The authorized officer, in consultation with a qualified cultural resources specialist, will make an evaluation of the discovery to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. (See attached waiver).

Recreation

No-Action

The existing recreational use of the area would continue. No commercial horseback activities would be permitted on the project site and the availability of local public horseback riding services would stay at or near current levels. Local residents wishing to hike, ride all-terrain vehicles, horses and motorcycles would experience no change in access to public lands.

Proposed Action

The existing recreational use of the area would continue. Commercial horseback activities would

be permitted on the project site. Local residents wishing to hike or to ride all-terrain vehicles, horses and motorcycles would all be expected to experience a general increase in the amount of equestrian use on this particular trail route. Some user conflict would be expected. The increase in horse use may cause erosion or “troughing” in the roadbed which would require regular maintenance by EMI.

Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts

The applicant would be required to improve and maintain Trail “A”, including the installation and maintenance of drainage dips and waterbars. Such improvements would be subject to the review and approval of a representative of the BLM. Monitoring for noxious weeds and non-native plant species would also be required. Any noxious weeds and non-native plants would be hand pulled along the trail. Information about the identification of noxious weeds and non-native plants would be provided by the BLM to EMI. (See attached Special Recreation Permit Stipulations).

Cumulative Impacts

It is likely that by locating corrals at Phase III and by conducting the proposed trail rides (which are mostly on private lands), longer commercial trail rides would be proposed on BLM managed lands further to the west. Use of this route by EMI for Eagle Crest Trail rides may also increase the use by residents of Phase III for hiking, mountain biking and ohv.

V. No Impact Items

The following critical elements were considered, but will not be addressed because they would either not be affected or do not exist in the project area.

- Agricultural Lands (prime or unique)
- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Environmental Justice
- Floodplains
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Paleontological Resources
- Visual Resources
- Wastes (hazardous or solid)
- Water Quality (surface or ground)
- Wetlands/Riparian Areas
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness (including Wilderness Study Areas)

VI. Consultation and Coordination

Persons and Agencies Consulted

Dave Herman, Equestrian Management, Inc.
Mark Halley, Equestrian Management, Inc.
Alan Van Vleet, Eagle Crest Resort
Glen Arndt, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Preparers

Greg Currie, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Gavin Hoban, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Robin Snyder, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Teal Purrington, Rangeland Management Specialist
Ron Gregory, Archeologist
Ron Halvorson, Natural Resources Specialist, T & E / Budget
Bill Dean, Wildlife Biologist
JoAnne Armson, Natural Resources Technician

NEPA requirements met:

Marci Todd, Environmental Coordinator

Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant impacts. I have determined that the proposed action, with the mitigation measures described, will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Robert Towne, Deschutes Resource Area Manager

Date

2001 – 2002 BLM Special Recreation Permit Stipulations
Commercial Horseback Riding

- 1) The permittee will join a BLM employee to review commercial use of public lands annually at a mutually acceptable time of the year.
- 2) The permittee will limit use to authorized roads and trails.
- 3) The permittee will be responsible for flagging, maintaining and repairing trails used during commercial operations. All plans for alteration of the permit area must be approved by the authorized officer before any work occurs. Trails may be closed for administrative, public safety or resource protection purposes. Noxious weeds and non-native plants will be hand pulled as deemed necessary by the authorized officer. See attached pamphlet.
- 4) Trail sign design, wording and placement is the responsibility of the permittee and must be approved in writing by the BLM.
- 5) The maximum party size allowed is 7 including guides, employees, clients and non-paying guests. 3000 use days per year will be allowed.
- 6) Overnight camping will be prohibited.
- 7) Horse grazing or use is not allowed in riparian area on BLM managed public lands. The permittee will water horses in a confined area. Stream crossings will be monitored for impacts and may require bridges or improvements to prevent streambank erosion and siltation in the stream.
- 8) Supplemental feeding of horses is not allowed on public lands.
- 9) The permittee will not prevent other visitors from using public lands.
- 10) The permittee will pay advance user fees at least 30 days prior to commercial operations. Advance user fees of more than \$2,500 may be paid in two installments (one-half the total amount due per payment). The first installment is due at least 30 days prior to commercial activities and the second installment is due no later than September 30.
- 11) The permittee will submit a completed Post Use Report (including actual use and gross receipts) to the BLM annually no later than 14 days after the end of each calendar year.
- 12) The permittee will maintain insurance coverage in accordance with BLM policy and inform the BLM 30 days prior to canceling insurance.
- 13) The permittee has a continuing responsibility to identify and abate hazardous conditions

on the permit area which could affect improvements or pose a risk of injury to individuals. Any actions to abate such hazards will be performed after consultation with the authorized officer.

- 14) The permittee must notify the authorized officer of the following incidents which occur while involved in activities authorized by the permit no later than 48 hours after the incident has occurred: 1) death from any cause, 2) lost or missing persons, 3) personal injury requiring medical attention by a doctor or health care professional, or 4) property damage greater than \$500.
- 15) The BLM reserves the right to modify or cancel this permit within 30 days of written notification after determining that continued operation under this permit is not within the best interests of the public, or if non-compliance of any stipulation has occurred. The BLM reserves the right to alter the route of trails and roads available to use under this permit based on current management objectives.